

# SPIRITUALITY & THE ESSENTIAL SELF

Building Bridges Mental Health & Addictions  
Conference

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The search for meaning and purpose in life, and understanding one's place in the world and the their relationship to others, the environment and beyond is an 'activity' undertaken by everyone.



# SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

- ✗ A threat to personhood & self (Sullivan 1994)
- ✗ A thief that robs the individual of a concept of who they are (O'Reilly 2004)

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Recovery is about redefintion, reforging &  
discovery of self

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“Successful incorporation of spiritual approaches into clinical practice has the potential to contribute to the next quantum leap in the development of effective [recovery]-centered systems of care”

(Russinova & Blanch 2007:248)



## Bio-medical discourses

- ✗ Reductionist
- ✗ Provide little understanding of tangata whai ora as a person
- ✗ Little contribution to 'true recovery' (Cooper 1993)

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## (W)Holistic Constructions

- ✕ BioPsychoSocial Discourses
- ✕ Indigenous Wellbeing Discourses



# Barriers to Non-Acceptance of Spirituality

- ✗ The history of the development of thought about mental health/illness
  - ✗ Professional stereotypes
- ✗ Confusions &/or fears about the meaning of spirituality

Longo & Peterson 2002

# DEFINING SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION

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- ✗ Divergent views
  - ✗ Inconsistency when using terms
- ✗ Numerous conceptions = No consensus
- ✗ Defined in terms of relationships, inner motivations, existential quests & prescriptions

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Regardless of definition used there is consensus that religion & spirituality are positively associated with improved health & wellbeing, and is important to the journey of recovery



# THREE VIEWS OF SPIRITUALITY

- ✗ Religion as a concept within which spirituality is included (Hill et al 2000, Zinnbauer et al 1999)
- ✗ Spirituality is the broader concept inclusive of religion (Koenig 2001)
- ✗ Religion & Spirituality are distinct constructs that overlap (Miller & Thoresen 2003)

# COMMON THEMES OF SPIRITUALITY

- ✕ The discovery of a sense of purpose
  - ✕ A sense of connectedness
    - ✕ A quest for wholeness
  - ✕ The search for hope & harmony
- ✕ A belief in a higher power or being(s)
- ✕ Promoting a sense of what matters in life

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“Spirituality is that aspect of human existence that gives it its ‘human-ness’. It concerns the structures of significance that give meaning and direction to a person’s life and helps them deal with vicissitudes of existence.”

(Swinton & Pattison 2001)



# POSITIVE BENEFITS

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- ✗ Coping Styles
- ✗ Locus of control
- ✗ Social supports & networks
- ✗ Psychological mechanisms & factors in the built environment

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# HOPE

# STRATEGIES & PRACTICES

- ✖ Training & education
- ✖ Avoid pathologising, dismissing or ignoring spiritual & religious experiences
  - ✖ Expand professional connections